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SUBJECT: CODEL HIRONO DISCUSSES REFORM, EDUCATION, AND JOBS WITH  
SENIOR HAITIAN OFFICIALS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A Congressional delegation led by Rep. Mazie Hirono met with the President, Prime Minister, and parliamentary leaders during its May 8-11 visit to Haiti. The delegation, accompanied by the Ambassador, reaffirmed U.S. support for efforts to promote Haiti's stability and prosperity, and outlined the House Democracy Assistance Commission's assistance programs. Haitian officials highlighted their efforts to improve the climate for foreign investment and strengthen Haiti's institutions, including Parliament, where a lack of infrastructure and accumulated expertise has prevented the legislature from playing a more constructive role in reform efforts. End summary.

#### PRESIDENT PREVAL PLEADS FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE

¶2. (SBU) A Congressional delegation led by Rep. Mazie Hirono and including Reps. David Dreier, Jim McDermott, Gwen Moore, and Kilili Sablan, met with Haitian President Rene Preval at the National Palace May 8. On behalf of the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC), the delegation outlined the U.S. Congress's partnership with the Haitian legislature and expressed continued support for Haiti's reforms to encourage foreign investment and economic growth.

¶3. (SBU) President Preval welcomed the delegation to Haiti and surveyed the government's efforts to generate economic growth in the wake of the 2008 food riots and hurricanes. The U.S. travel advisory, he argued, made attracting foreign investment more difficult despite the trade preferences contained in the Haitian Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE II) Act. He also argued that money currently dedicated to MINUSTAH peacekeeping in Haiti would be more profitably spent on assistance, pointing out that donors had pledged only half of what the Haitian government sought at the April donor conference in Washington.

#### PRIME MINISTER PIERRE-LOUIS ON EDUCATION, JOBS, DRUGS

¶4. (SBU) In her May 9 meeting with the delegation, Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis stressed the importance of education in overcoming Haiti's economic challenges. Although it had traditionally been the realm of the church, she said, the government now must move quickly to improve access to and the quality of education in Haiti. She was hopeful that Haiti could continue to take advantage of HOPE II trade preferences, although pending legislation to nearly triple the minimum wage would likely set back those efforts in the short term. Responding to a question from Rep. McDermott, PM Pierre-Louis cited the continued vulnerability of the judicial system to drug-related corruption as a serious obstacle to the strengthening of the Haitian state. She said that drug money influences Haitian politics to some degree but praised USG programs to fight drug trafficking and strengthen the Haitian National Police.

#### PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS SHARE PROGRESS ON REFORMS

¶5. (SBU) During a May 8 meeting with the delegation, Senate Vice President Andris Riche expressed his gratitude to the Congressional

delegation for the USG's continued support of the Haitian legislature, especially the Project for the Support of the Haitian Parliament (PAPH). Rep. Hirono emphasized HDAC's desire to contribute to the strengthening of democratic institutions in Haiti.

The Congressional delegation expressed concern over the Senate's 12 vacancies and the relatively low turnout in the first round of the partial Senate elections April 19. Senator Riche acknowledged the delegation's concerns but expressed hope that limited voter participation would not pose a political obstacle to the validation of election results. He added that the Parliament faces a number of physical and resource constraints.

¶6. (SBU) In the Chamber of Deputies later the same day, the delegation discussed with leading Deputies the reforms needed to strengthen the Chamber. Reps. Dreier and McDermott emphasized the importance of institutional memory and continuity through elections and the need to focus on the role of deputies as legislators. On the last point, Rep. Dreier noted that the expectations in Haiti are perhaps too high, in that deputies are expected to become mayors and development agents in their constituencies, rather than being allowed to focus on national priorities. The Deputies noted that the Chamber is currently considering a decentralization bill that would give resources to local and regional government structures, which in turn could ease local pressures on the Deputies.

¶7. (SBU) The President of the Chamber, Levaillant Louis-Jeune, indicated that several steps had already been taken in the reform process: the recruitment for a Secretary General has begun and staff restructuring has already taken place. Other Chamber officers expressed concern over the history of 'hostility' from the executive branch, which combined with the expectations at the local level, makes it difficult for Deputies to successfully stand for re-election. The Deputies indicated that the Parliament is considering legislation to allow Deputies' to continue in office until elections take place, rather than having Parliament become inactive if the legislative elections scheduled for the end of 2009 are delayed. (Note: A bill modifying the 2008 Electoral Law and reportedly containing language to this effect was subsequently approved by both chambers and awaits the signature of President Preval. End note.) The Deputies were hopeful that, for the first time since the fall of the Duvalier regime, a parliament would complete its mandate and that timely elections would allow for a smooth transition to the next legislature.

¶8. (SBU) The delegation also meet with Senator Edmonde Supplice Beauzile and Deputy Marie Jossie Etienne. Senator Beauzile outlined her views on the constitutional reform process, arguing that any changes to the relationship between the executive and legislative branches must not be to the detriment of the latter. Deputy Etienne recounted her election to Parliament after Haiti's electoral authority disallowed approximately 4,000 votes initially counted for her opponent. She also requested assistance for women legislators to help them in drafting, reviewing, and promoting legislation that addresses gender issues in Haiti, in particular women's inheritance rights, child support, and measures related to co-habitation. Congresswoman Hirono discussed her experience in the United States with organizations designed to promote the election of women legislators and advocate legislation that addresses women's concerns.

#### DELEGATION HIGHLIGHTS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, RULES OF PROCEDURE

¶9. (U) In a May 11 conference sponsored by the House Democracy Assistance Commission, Senate President Kely Bastien and Chamber President Louis-Jeune welcomed the delegation's interest in strengthening Haiti's legislature and provided an overview of the progress the Parliament has achieved to date on key legislation and internal reforms. Delegation members exchanged views with Parliament members and staff on the importance of timely, nonpartisan research on pressing legislative issues as well as the role of rules of legislative procedure in mediating political conflicts.

¶10. (U) CODEL Hirono has cleared this cable.

SANDERSON